



FOUNDING FEMALES Female Qualifying Ancestor Index

Female Ancestor Number: 198

Name: Breintnall, Hannah (Sharp)

Dates: (c. 1707 - 25 Aug 1770)

Colonial Society: PA

Date added to ROA: 12-22-2024

Service: : Woman of Distinction: Proprietor Optician Shop "Sign of the Golden Spectacles"

Authority: The Pennsylvania Gazette, 30 March 1758, 3; 16 May 1765, 1; Wulf, Karin, *Not All Wives: Women of Colonial Philadelphia*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000, pp. 132-133.

Biography:

In March of 1758, Hannah Breintall advertised in the Pennsylvania Gazette for a "variety of the finest..." eyewear available at the Sign of the Spectacles on Second Street near Black Horse Alley. She continued to import eyewear from London through the years, with another similar advertisement in 1765. How did a woman become a proprietor of eye glass imports?

At the age of 18, Hannah Sharp of Burlington County, NJ married John Brientnall of Philadelphia. Their marriage was recorded in the records of the Rancocas and Burlington Monthly Meeting in October of 1724. Hannah was Breintnall's second wife, his first, Susannah Shoemaker died just four years previous leaving behind two children, a son & daughter, under the age of 5. Becoming an instant mother, Hannah would add six more daughters to the family. John was a craftsperson who worked as a joiner and Windsor chairmaker, yet he was also a part of his family's industrious mercantile concerns. When his father David died in 1732, John advertised that the eyewear that was previously sold by shopkeeper David Brientnall would now be sold by him at the *Whalebone* on Chestnut Street. It makes sense that by the time Hannah became a widow in 1747, she could and would take over (or perhaps continue) the work of running an opticians shop, that included other items such as magnifying glasses and telescopes. She also benefitted from additional rental income. By 1767, her wealth was assessed at £30, which placed her among the top 10 percent of taxable income that year. Upon her death in 1770 her estate was assessed at £161 and included eyewear shop inventory as well as sundry items including thimbles and shoemakers hammers. It also included 3 years of "servant girl's time."